

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 7, 2012

1:05 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Peggy Wilson, Chair
Representative Lance Pruitt, Vice Chair
Representative Eric Feige
Representative Craig Johnson
Representative Cathy Engstrom Munoz
Representative Max Gruenberg

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Pete Petersen

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 248

"An Act naming the Al Wright Airport at Minto."

- MOVED HB 248 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 249

"An Act naming the Koyukuk Station Veterans' Airport at Koyukuk."

- MOVED HB 249 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 248

SHORT TITLE: HB 248-AL WRIGHT AIRPORT AT MINTO

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) DICK

01/17/12	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/6/12
01/17/12	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/17/12	(H)	TRA, FIN
02/07/12	(H)	TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 249

SHORT TITLE: KOYUKUK STATION VETERANS' AIRPORT

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) DICK

01/17/12	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/6/12
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01/17/12 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/17/12 (H) TRA, FIN
02/07/12 (H) TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

CYNTHIA ERICKSON, Staff
Representative Alan Dick
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HB 248 and HB 249 on behalf of Representative Alan Dick, prime sponsor of the bill.

MARC A. LUIKEN, Commissioner
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified and answered questions during the discussion of HB 249.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:05:42 PM](#)

CHAIR PEGGY WILSON called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. Representatives Gruenberg, Feige, Pruitt, and Wilson were present at the call to order. Representatives Johnson and Munoz arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 248-AL WRIGHT AIRPORT AT MINTO

[1:06:10 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 248, "An Act naming the Al Wright Airport at Minto."

[1:06:49 PM](#)

CYNTHIA ERICKSON, Staff, Representative Alan Dick, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of the bill's sponsor, read from a prepared sponsor statement, as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Al Wright was born at Tanana Crossing on April 26, 1925 to Arthur and Myrtle Wright, missionaries in the Minto Flats area. Arthur Wright was Athabascan Indian

and Myrtle was white. Mrs. Wright was one of the first nurses in the villages. In 1930 the family moved to Minto.

The Wright family lived a subsistence lifestyle. In Minto his dad tried to start a school. He had a hard time because the kids had to go back to seasonal subsistence camps. Each child would bring a stick of wood as tuition. When the wood ran out that ended the school day.

When Al was nine, they moved to Nenana where his father started work in the shipyard. His family also cut and sold wood for \$8.00 a cord with a Sears&Roebuck wood saw. They dragged the wood with a model-T vehicle back to the village to sell.

Al was 15 when he started in construction on defense projects all over Interior Alaska. He had no formal training and learned as he went along. His skills were in high demand on the defense projects, however he wanted to join the Army. The only way he could leave his job was to quit the construction work and get drafted. When he got out of the Army, he found out he could get his pilot's license with the G.I. bill. He originally started for fun, but never got away from flying.

His first plane was a 65 Taylorcraft. One day a man asked to charter him to pick up furs. He said, "Boy, this is the way to make money." From then on he started hauling trappers and developing a business. His first charter was \$20.00 an hour with fuel, plane and pilot. He taught himself to fly with floats. With no formal training, his first flight was to pick up a dying man in a Minto fish camp. He flew about 200 hours before he was forced to get an official float rating.

[1:08:50 PM](#)

MS. ERICKSON continued to read from a prepared sponsor statement, as follows [original punctuation provided]:

He had trouble getting ratings and licenses, because he had little education. He struggled his whole life because he never learned how to read well, write or

spell. He quit school after the sixth grade as he took on more seasonal work with the family.

Al started Wright's Air Service in 1950 which continued to grow in Interior Alaska. His focus was on maintaining high standards with maintenance and with his employees. He was the critical link for scheduled mail and charter flights to about 20 villages. Wright's Air today is a well-known charter operation in the Interior, supporting government surveys, seasonal camps, firefighting, land surveying and hunting expeditions. In 1983 Al sold his airline to long-time friend and pilot, Bob Burcell. Bob continues to run the airline with the same old time values, kindness and respect Al had for his people and villages.

[1:09:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG asked whether Mr. Wright is still alive.

MS. ERICKSON answered yes. She stated she spent an hour on the telephone with him last night, that he is 86 years old and still flying. She described him as a really awesome man.

[1:10:23 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON, after first determining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 248.

[1:10:57 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ moved to report HB 248 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying zero fiscal note. There being no objection, HB 248 was reported from the House Transportation Standing Committee.

HB 249-KOYUKUK STATION VETERANS' AIRPORT

[1:11:29 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON announced that the order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 249, "An Act naming the Koyukuk Station Veterans' Airport at Koyukuk."

[1:11:39 PM](#)

CYNTHIA ERICKSON, Staff, Representative Alan Dick, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of the bill's sponsor, read from a prepared sponsor statement, as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The original village of Koyukuk, primarily all Koyukon Athabascan Indians, was established around 1867. It used to be called Koyukuk Station, because a military telegraph line was constructed along the North side of the Yukon, and Koyukuk became the site of the telegraph station. In naming the airport, the residents also wish to honor the many Native military veterans who have served their country.

Koyukuk is located on the Yukon River, 30 miles west of Galena and 290 air miles from Fairbanks. It is adjacent to the Koyukuk and Innoko River Refuges.

The Russian traders were a big influence in this area, opening a trading post around 1880. Roman Catholic Missionaries also had a major impact on the Athabascans. The first school was constructed in 1939, this resulted in the Koyukon people living in the village year around.

Up until then, the Koyukon Athabascans lived a subsistence lifestyle, moving among seasonal fish and game camps. They moved as the wild game migrated. Most of the people who settled here were from up the Koyukuk River, as far as the Dolbi River, which is close to Huslia. Even when people settled in Koyukuk they continued to travel up the Koyukuk to winter trapping camps and returned in the spring.

The Native name for Koyukuk is, Meneelghaadze T'oh.

[1:13:22 PM](#)

MS. ERICKSON continued to read from a prepared sponsor statement, as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Meneelghaadze is the name of the mountain at Koyukuk. Madeline Solomon, now deceased Elder from Koyukuk, had said the mountain was named Meneelghaadze, because long ago, the Koyukon people used to go get clay at the mountain and mix with bird feathers to make clay

pots. Eliza Jones an Elder from Koyukuk said that in Athabascan, "T'oh" would be added on, meaning at the base of the mountain. Meneelghaadze T'oh means, "at the base of the Koyukuk Mountain."

Today Koyukuk people are still living a subsistence lifestyle. The main employment is the local government, clinic, school, store and any firefighting and construction seasonal jobs.

[1:13:55 PM](#)

MS. ERICKSON challenged members to pronounce the Native name for the village.

[1:14:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG asked whether the commissioner was willing to absorb the \$2,000 so the bill would not have a finance referral.

MARC A. LUIKEN, Commissioner, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF), answered he would be willing to do so but in doing so it will take away from other transportation needs.

[1:15:11 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON explained that other bills naming transportation entities will be taken up in House finance. She indicated her preference to have this bill continue to have a House Finance Committee referral. She explained that this bill could potentially be combined with similar measures into one bill.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked whether the previous bill considered today, HB 248, also has a referral to the House Finance Committee since it has a zero fiscal note. He expressed interest in consistency.

CHAIR P. WILSON agreed HB 248 has a further referral to the House Finance Committee.

[1:15:58 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease from 1:15 p.m. to 1:16 p.m.

[1:16:41 PM](#)

CHAIR P. WILSON, after first determining no one else wished to testify, asked for the wishes of the committee. [The committee treated it as though the chair had closed public testimony on HB 249.]

[1:16:49 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT moved to report HB 249 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal note. There being no objection, HB 249 was reported from the House Transportation Standing Committee.

[1:17:07 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIR P. WILSON recessed the meeting at 1:17 p.m. [The meeting never reconvened.]